



MID-COUNTY CITIZENS ADVISORY BOARD

Isiah Leggett
County Executive

Ana L. van Balen
Director

December 19, 2013

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive
101 Monroe Street,
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Dear Mr. Leggett:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Mid-County Citizens Advisory Board (MCCAB) to provide the MCCAB's advice and recommendations as you develop your recommended fiscal year 2015 (FY15) operating budget. This letter reflects public deliberation by the MCCAB and draws upon past MCCAB recommendations as well as recent recommendations from the Wheaton Public Safety Working Group and the Nighttime Economy Task Force. We have divided our recommendations into categories based on your recommended FY14 operating budget.

A. Public Safety

Police

As recommended by the Nighttime Economy Task Force, the County's FY15 operating budget should maintain and as necessary, increase funding for dedicated Wheaton urban district police units. Continued funding for dedicated urban district police units will help to ensure policing issues are addressed in a timely and proactive manner.¹ Specifically, as recommended by the Wheaton Public Safety Work Group, the FY15 operating budget should provide enough support for a well-equipped Wheaton urban district police unit especially as redevelopment draws more people to the area.²

¹ "Destination Montgomery: Shining Light on the Nighttime Economy." Nighttime Economy Task Force (October 2013) *available at* http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/NighttimeEconomy/Resources/Files/NETF_Final_Report.pdf (last visited December 17, 2013).

² "Wheaton: Turning Vision into Reality: Recommendations to Improve the Quality of Life in Out Community." Wheaton Public Safety Work Group (April 2013) *available at* http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/content/council/pdf/agenda/cm/2013/130613/20130613_PS2.pdf (last visited December 17, 2013).

Fire and Rescue Service

We recommend restoring \$200,000 in day work overtime Fire and Rescue staffing at Rescue 1 (Bethesda-Chevy Chase), Rescue 2 (Wheaton) and Station 5 (Kensington) that was eliminated in the FY13 operating budget. Data provided to the MCCAB by the Wheaton Volunteer Rescue Squad indicates this staffing reduction resulted in at least 52 “failures to respond” at Rescue 2 (Wheaton) in 2012. As we have stated in previous letters, these staffing reductions raise serious public safety concerns. Therefore, we urge you to recommend that the County Council restore this funding.

Department of Transportation Pedestrian Safety

We support adequate funding for pedestrian safety initiatives. Such funding may provide for maintenance and expansion of existing programs to reduce collisions and resulting injuries, and to increase walkability throughout our community.

B. Services for Vulnerable Populations

Department of Health and Human Services

We support adequate funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). This funding helps provide important physical and mental health services, and enables the agency to respond effectively to the emerging needs of our community.

Department of Housing & Community Affairs

We support adequate funding for the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA). This funding provides our community with access to a broad range of services to help our residents obtain affordable housing, live in safe and sanitary living conditions especially through Special Needs Housing (SNH), and take advantage of loan and rental assistance programs through the Montgomery Housing Initiative. MCCAB believes this dedicated funding will ultimately assist with economic and housing security services providing better stability for vulnerable households in mid-county.

C. Transportation

Department of Transportation

We support maintaining sufficient funding for the Department of Transportation (DOT). Sufficient funding is important for improving traffic and pedestrian safety in our community.

Office of Consumer Protection

“Predatory towing” continues to be of concern to mid-county residents. We recommend that OCP work with other agencies including DOT to study the state of towing in the mid-county area in FY15. We are concerned that aggressive towing and poor signage may hinder economic growth by scaring potential customers away from businesses in Wheaton and elsewhere.

Traffic Engineering & Operations

We support adequate funding for the Division of Traffic Engineering & Operations (DTEO). This funding will help support improved commuter services that will promote increased use of mass transit and other transportation alternatives within our community. We believe DTEO plays a critical role in connecting mid-county communities along the Georgia Avenue corridor. DTEO’s continued focus on coordinating the placement of bus stops with local communities, planning for future Bus Rapid Transit/Vehicle Rapid Transit and other functions helps to link together mid-county communities and improve access to services and economic opportunities.

D. Libraries, Culture, and Recreation

Public Libraries

We support adequate funding for public libraries. This funding helps support library staff, operating hours, circulation services, and materials. Library funding is a priority for the MCCAB as the mid-county area prepares for the opening of the new Olney library and looks forward to a new combined Wheaton Library and Recreation Center to replace the existing Wheaton Recreation Center and Wheaton Regional Library. The MCCAB also notes that libraries in Kensington and Aspen Hill may be in need of improvements and upgrades to meet the changing needs of their surrounding community.

E. Community & Economic Development

Department of Economic Development

We support maintaining sufficient funding for the Department of Economic Development (DED). Adequate funding for DED supports critical business development programs to attract companies to start up, relocate, or expand in Montgomery County and increases the potential for greater job creation and capital investment within our community.

Economic development in Wheaton and other urban districts will help generate jobs and create additional tax revenue. This economic development will likely increase demand for services. We recommend the DED conduct a study in FY15 on establishing a Special Taxing District in commercial areas which may support an enhanced nighttime economy. A Special

Taxing District may hold particular promise in bringing the benefits of economic development to current residents in and around urban districts.

F. Community Engagement

Mid-County Regional Center

As recommended to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) by the Nighttime Economy Task Force, the OMB should “[s]upport dedicated public safety resources for the nighttime economy in high-density urban centers [...]” by hiring regional public safety liaisons³. Additionally, the MCCAB continues to support restoring staff reductions at the Mid-County Regional Center as recommended by the Wheaton Public Safety Work Group.

Office of Community Partnerships

The MCCAB also continues to support funding for the Charles W. Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity (the Gilchrist Center). The Gilchrist Center continues to provide critical services to mid-county residents such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for adults.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. The MCCAB looks forward to your ongoing budget deliberations.

Sincerely,



Kieran McHargue
Chair of MCCAB

³ “Destination Montgomery: Shining Light on the Nighttime Economy.” Nighttime Economy Task Force (October 2013) available at http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/NighttimeEconomy/Resources/Files/NETF_Final_Report.pdf (last visited December 17, 2013).